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THE OLD NORTHWEST, 1760-1796

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THE settlers of the Old Northwest during the British régime found considerable time for leisure midst a busy life, although it is true that their energies were mainly devoted to the practical problems of clearing small areas of the forest for their villages, planting crops, building homes, trading in furs, and constantly struggling with the Indians. These people were the pioneers of a new civilization in the vast hinterland which now comprises the populous states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Theirs was to toil and fight, and yet a study of their life shows that there were many leisure hours to be filled with games and sports of all kinds. One discovers that despite a large degree of isolation from the outside world, and the fact that distances were so great from village to village as to make common exchange of interests and ideas almost impossible, their social activities were about the same as they were in the East. Human nature did not vary greatly, whether in the fur posts of the Old Northwest, or in Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia.

At the close of the French period there were a number of settlements in the Old Northwest, largely fur trading posts. Among these were Detroit and Michillimackinac within the present confines of the state of Michigan,

Vincennes on the Wabash River, and several small villages scattered along the Mississippi, extending from the mouth of the Kaskaskia River northward seventy-five miles to Cahokia.

The leading citizens of these villages were members of three different groups. The first, and by far the most important group, was made up of the old and well-established French families known as the "gentry"—a rather elastic term—among whom there was to be found a considerable degree of refinement and culture.¹ Some of these came from the better classes in Canada and France, and made an effort to surround themselves with all the luxuries that could be brought from Canada and Europe. A few possessed considerable capital before migrating to Michigan and Illinois, and others rose to prominence by industry, astuteness, and good fortune. Among the more prominent were Jean Baptiste Barbau of Prairie du Rocher, the Bauvais, Charleville, Viviat, Janis, and Cerré families of Kaskaskia, and the Saucier, François Trottier, Girardin, and J. B. H. La Croix families of Cahokia.² In Detroit, there were the Barthe, Campau, Navarre, Labadie, Drouillard, Legrand, Baptiste, and Jacques Baby families.³ Gay they were, and light-hearted, yet pious; honest beyond comparison, generous

¹ An excellent discussion of the French Canadians is found in Victor Coffin, *The Province of Quebec and the Early American Revolution, A Study in English-American Colonial History* (Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin. Economics, Political Science, and History Series, I, no. 3, Madison, 1896), chap. I. A good account of the French villages is in Albert A. Babeau, *Le Village Sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1882), chap. I.

² C. W. Alvord, *Cahokia Records 1778-1790* (Illinois Historical Collections, II, Springfield, 1907), xix-xx. John Jennings noted that some of the Illinois inhabitants were wealthy, but in general "very indolent." C. W. Alvord and C. E. Carter, *The New Régime 1765-1767* (Illinois Historical Collections, XI, Springfield, 1916), 177.

³ *The John Askin Papers*, edited by Milo M. Quaife (Detroit, 1928), I: *passim*. See also C. M. Burton, *The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922* (Detroit, 1922), vols. I and II. Among some of the prominent families at Michillimackinac, though not of the gentry, were the Ainse, Chevalier, Sejournée, Langlade, Bourassa, Cauchois, Cadotte and Chaboillez families.

to a fault, hospitable, free, and laughter-loving, with no cares from "ambition or science."⁴ They always seemed to enjoy life keenly, being gay even when times were at their worst. Possibly ignorant of books they were, but certainly neither boorish nor unintelligent. Their easy-going ways were doubtless due to their placing no great value on time, of which they had an abundance.

The British fur traders and merchants who came into the country at the close of the Seven Years' War made another social group. They were industrious and energetic, and it was not long before success crowned their efforts, making them clearly the leading force both economically and socially.

Again, there were the military officers at the forts, who found time hanging heavily on their hands, with only the dull routine of garrison duty to perform. They constituted a very important element in the social life, and found plenty of attractive, vivacious young women for partners at the balls, which were the principal convivial activities of the posts.

Below these groups was the large mass of people: *habitants*, *coureurs de bois*, *voyageurs*, and slaves. These were pleasure-loving also, dissipating their energies for the most part in "drinking, gambling, and gossiping; and as irresponsible as children, they were easily turned aside from the pursuit of their real interests." But with all their faults, conspicuous though they were, the *habitants* differed much from the American frontiersmen. The latter had no respect for law and authority, while the *habitants* usually preferred to be guided by law in their

⁴ Apparently life did not change much, for as late as 1836 a similar description of the French in Kaskaskia was given by Edmund Flagg. *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland, 1906), XXVII: 52 ff.

intercourse. Quarrels were frequent, but instead of ending them in fights, they went to the courts for settlement; especially in their business transactions, the French sought the aid of a judge or notary.⁵ C. F. Volney, the noted traveler who made a tour of the upper Mississippi Valley toward the close of the eighteenth century, was not favorably impressed with these people. He wrote:

They know nothing of civil or domestic affairs: their women can neither sow, nor spin, nor make butter, but spend their time in gossiping and tattle, while all at home is dirt and disorder. The men take to nothing but hunting, fishing, roaming in the woods, and loitering in the sun. They do not lay up, as we do for winter or provide for a rainy day. They cannot cure pork or venison, make sour kraut or spruce beer, or distill spirits from apples, or rye, all needful arts to the farmer. If they trade, they try by exorbitant charges to make much out of a little; for *little* is generally their *all*, and what they get they throw away upon the Indian girls, in toys and bawbles. Their time is wasted too in trifling stories of their insignificant adventures, and journies *to town* to see their friends. . . . [Thus they speak of New Orleans, as if it were a walk of half an hour, instead of fifteen hundred miles down the river.]

The Frenchman, on the contrary, will be up betimes, for the pleasure of viewing and talking over matters with his wife, whose counsel he demands. Their constant agreement would be quite a miracle: the wife dissents, argues, wrangles, and the husband has his own way, or gives up to her, and is irritated or disheartened. Home, perhaps, grows irksome, so he takes his gun, goes a shooting or a journeying, or to chat with a neighbour. If he stays at home, he either whiles away the hour in good humoured talk, or he scolds and quarrels. Neighbors interchange visits: for to visit and talk are so necessary to a Frenchman, from habit. . . . There is nowhere a settler of that nation to be found, but within sight or reach of some other. On asking how far off the remotest settler was, I have been told, He is in the woods, with the bears, a league from any house, and with nobody to talk to

⁵ Alvord, *Cabokia Records*, xviii, 589. Another picture of conditions is found in C. W. Alvord and C. E. Carter, *Trade and Politics 1767-1769* (*Illinois Historical Collections*, XVI, Springfield, 1921), 497. This describes the French of Illinois as "a Cunning, litigious, jealous, set of people."

The Frenchman's ideas evaporate in ceaseless chat; he exposes himself to bickering and contradiction; excites the garrulity of his wife and sisters; involves himself in quarrels with his neighbours; and finds in the end, that his life has been squandered away without use or benefit.⁶

Other travelers seemed to be more or less of the same impression. George Croghan described the French of Detroit as "generally poor wretches . . . a lazy, idle people, depending chiefly on the savages for their subsistence."⁷ Philip Pittman noted that the male inhabitants of Illinois were "very superstitious and ignorant."⁸ Victor Collot, after an extended journey through the interior of North America, described the settlers of the Illinois region as follows:

These people are, for the most part, traffickers, adventurers, hunters, rowers, and warriors; ignorant, superstitious, and obstinate; accustomed to fatigue and privations, and stopped by no sense of danger in the undertakings they form, and which they usually accomplish.

In domestic life, their characters and dispositions are similar to those of the Indians with whom they live; indolent, careless, and addicted to drunkenness, they cultivate little or no ground, speak a French jargon, and have forgotten the division of time and months. If they are asked at what time such an event took place, they answer, "in the time of the great waters, of the strawberries, of the maize, of potatoes:" if they are advised to change any practice which is evidently wrong, or if observations are made to them respecting the amelioration of agriculture, or the augmentation of any branch of commerce, the only answer they give is this: "It is the custom; our fathers did so: I have done well; my children will do the same." They love France, and speak of their country with pride.⁹

⁶ C. F. Volney, *A View of the Soil and Climate of the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1804), 336-37, 346-47.

⁷ "Croghan's Journals" in Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, I: 152.

⁸ Philip Pittman, *The Present State of the European Settlements on the Mississippi*, edited by F. H. Hodder (Cleveland, 1906), 102. Jacob Lindley described the French at Detroit as "superstitiously religious, going to mass more than two hundred days in the year." "Jacob Lindley's Account," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* (Lansing, 1892), XVII:595.

⁹ Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America* (Paris, 1826), I:232-33. See *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 1908 (Springfield, 1909), 286.

The French gentlemen, when entertaining guests and attending mass or balls, dressed "beyond their means" and loved to appear "grand abroad."¹⁰ There is an abundance of evidence to be found in the numerous settlements of estates drawn up by the notary clerk and preserved in the Kaskaskia manuscripts, to indicate a luxury of dress that is astonishing; richly trimmed coats, embroidered waist coats with "diamond" buttons, silken hose and silver buckles are among some of the items frequently mentioned for the wealthier inhabitants. Both men and women made an effort to imitate as far as possible the styles of Paris or other European cities. Travelers recorded that stores and shops were well furnished, with every kind of fine cloth, linen in fact, and every article of apparel for men and women.¹¹ These were sold on the frontier nearly as reasonably as they were in New York and Philadelphia. Descriptions of dances, especially the more elaborate balls, pictured the men as wearing "very fine fur caps" adorned with "Black Ostridge Feathers" and amazingly large "Cockades" of white tinsel ribbon, and again, dressed in "their best bibs & Tuckers."¹² The women at the posts, like many of their sex still, were said to pay too much attention to dressing their heads, and when making social calls decked themselves as though "their parents possessed the greatest dignities in the state." As in every age and clime, the men complained of their improvident attention to the newest fashions, since, in spite of their isolation, the woman were not unfamiliar with the best

¹⁰ Henry Hamilton to the Earl of Dartmouth, August 29-September 2, 1776, *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, X:267; "Lindley's Account," *ibid.*, XVII:566-632.

¹¹ Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America During the Years of 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London, 1800), II: 185-86.

¹² "A Narrative of Life on the Old Frontier; Henry Hay's Journal from Detroit to the Mississippi River," edited by M. M. Quaife, *Wisconsin Historical Society Proceedings, 1914* (Madison, 1915), 240-41. Henry Hay was the son of Lieut. Gov. John (Jehu) Hay.

of the day's vogue. Relatives or friends who traveled, advised the frontier women of all the changes of Dame Fashion. One, Archange Askin, second child of Mr. and Mrs. John Askin of Detroit, married Captain David Meredith and shortly after moved to England. Her charming and vivacious letters to her parents and sisters at home kept them well informed on the styles of dress in England.

Low crowned chip hats [she advised], with large bows of strip coloured ribbon, is the prevailing system, with frilld calico jackets, and broad sashes, and nothing is now so vulgar for either gentlemen, or lady, as to be seen with a silk stocking that appears the least blue.¹³

She was very observant, all which duly affected the styles in the faraway frontier posts.

I notice [she wrote her mother] that all the ladies are wearing their skirts almost under the arms so as to raise the waist line. Sashes are about the width of a narrow collar and are fastened at the back with a buckle. Neckerchiefs are very open as formerly and the neckband very narrow. The hair is curled, hanging at the back and arranged in small curls in front, with a piece of ribbon or a band of muslin around the head; even a thin lawn handkerchief arranged for a headdress, with a white feather in it, is very fashionable in the best society, so there is no need of going to great expense about dressing the hair.¹⁴

A careful inspection of the contemporary records furnishes data which accords rather poorly with the popu-

¹³ Mrs. Meredith to Askin, April 7, 1793, Quaife, *Askin Papers*, I: 470-71. James MacDonald mentioned in a letter, March 10, 1761, the "handsome appearance" of the ladies who came to the commandant's quarters "every Sunday night . . . to play at Cards . . . till twelve O'clock at night." Photostat in the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan. The originals are in the British Museum.

¹⁴ Mrs. Meredith to Mrs. Askin, February 3, 1795, *Askin Papers*, I: 534-35. Her letters were full of such descriptions. *Ibid.*, 517, 575-76. Some of the military men picked their wives from the frontier women, and found upon their removal to England some social difficulties. Captain Henry Bird found himself in such a predicament. He wrote: "The ladies have undertaken to drill Mrs. Bird and do not despair of her coming in and out of a room without being taken for an Indian Lady in less than a year." Bird to William Edgar, January 28, 1785, Edgar MSS. (These papers are in the private collection of Herman Edgar of New York City). For a sketch of Bird, see *ibid.*, 186.

lar conception of frontier habits and dress. The inventories of wardrobes found in these wilderness settlements show a profusion of rich attire. John Askwith, a clerk of John Askin, falling heavily into debt, had his wardrobe, which he brought from Montreal, sold at public auction.¹⁵ One item, two pairs of leather breeches, was quite in keeping with the times.

But what manner of life did this recently penniless Detroit clerk lead that should account for the possession of thirty-six other pairs of breeches and trousers? A vest is a conventional article of male attire, but what social functions did Askwith attend which should necessitate the possession of thirty different vests? For the most part these garments are not described, but included in the number was one satin vest (did it match the satin breeches?), one of cassimere, one of white cloth, and one "black vest princess stuff." Among other items of this pioneer Detroiters' wardrobe were a dozen shirts, ten cravats, and fifteen coats. There was a "camblet" coat, and a "camblet" cloak, a great coat, a white cloth coat, three black coats, and three flannel jackets.

A "parcel old hose and black torels" was sold for nineteen shillings. Did the auctioneer arbitrarily lump these things together, or did a Detroit gentleman in those days wear tassels on his hose? If not, to what other use did Askwith put the tassels, and what did the purchaser expect to do with them? In the absence of more detailed information one can only speculate on these matters. But there is no need to speculate over the "parcel of ruffles and 2 black stocks," which was sold immediately after the hose and "tossels."

Then there were silk gloves, shoe-buckles and other articles too numerous to mention. One finds no lack of clothes for every occasion.¹⁶

¹⁵ For this information and much which follows, I am indebted to the valuable article by M. M. Quaife, *Detroit Biographies: John Askwith* (Burton Historical Collection *Leaflet*, VII, no. 4, Detroit, 1929), *passim*.

¹⁶ Askin wrote from Michillimackinac for a piece of silk with the "trimmings." Askin to Isaac Todd and James McGill, May 8, 1778, *Askin Papers*, I: 84; and later he mentioned his great need of waistcoats and breeches, and six or eight yards of fine white cloth and suitable "trimmings." Same to same, June 23, 1778, *ibid.*, 143-44. In May, he ordered twelve pairs of shoes for Mrs. Askin, and a wedding gown of "french fashion" for Kitty. Same to same, May 28, 1778, *ibid.*, 102. The next month he sent a request for a gold thimble. Same to Richard Dobie, June 15, 1778, *ibid.*, 132. See Hay's descriptions of life at Miamitown in his Journal, *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1914, p.

The women had other traits of Mother Eve, aside from their interest in clothes and styles. One traveler recorded:

One of the first questions they propose to a stranger is, whether he is married. The next, how he likes the ladies in the country, and whether he thinks them handsomer than those of his own country; and the third, whether he will take one of them home with him.¹⁷

In this game of love, some unusual events occurred. William Edgar, with his "amorous Competitor, C. Barber" broke the heart of the "once admired Miss Gouin."¹⁸ James Bannerman thought this passion contagious at Detroit, "where its operations" seemed "in general singular and sometimes whimsical." John Hay longed to be back at Detroit, for he detested New York. This, he admitted, was because of the rumor that "fair Ellen [was] murdering people by dozens." He was not surprised, for he acknowledged she had "charmed enough to captivate many."¹⁹

But, as in all other phases of life, love was not without serious problems, for even the frontier had a code of morals. Captain Bird complained to Edgar of his serious loss when Mrs. Schieffelin left Detroit:

I was deprived of the happiness of her Society some months before her departure, some illiberal transactions of her very unworthy Partner, banished him from every Gentleman's company and I (from the arbitrary exactions of hard hearted custom) was reduced to the situation of Tantalus, and endured an intellectual famine in sight of a Rational banquet.²⁰

216 ff. In the many letters of George Morgan, one finds similar data for Illinois. Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, *passim*.

¹⁷ Peter Kalm, *Travels into North America* (London, 1770), 691-92. This was typical of the frontier, it seems. Askin, in 1778, congratulated Sampson Fleming upon the birth of a boy. "Perhaps," he wrote, "he may one Day become my Son in law, I have Girls worth looking at." Askin to Fleming, April 28, 1778, *Askin Papers*, I: 79.

¹⁸ Bannerman to Edgar, October 14, 1779, Edgar MSS.

¹⁹ Hay to Edgar, July 8, 1784, *ibid*.

²⁰ Bird to Edgar, July 8, 1784, *ibid*.

He asked Edgar to see his friend and tell her that "no man admires her more, that I even love her as much as I ought."²¹ Neither did love go smoothly for William Maxwell, for his Sally "eloped from her bed and board" to live in a "house of her own."²² But he seemed, after living with her a year, to be glad of the change. "She tired me heartily," he claimed, "I mean with her tongue and hands." To his friend he confided: "I believe on the whole Socrates need no more be quoted for his patience with his wife where my story is known."²³ Nevertheless, in spite of all difficulties, these people were jovial and light-hearted, ever seeking pleasure in racing, hunting, dancing, lavish entertaining, card playing, and the various winter sports.

Most of the gentry lived comfortably and well. One account states that François Trottier at Cahokia was "grandly Housed" and that his home had a "great furnished hall."²⁴ The property of the Jesuits at Kaskaskia was described as being divided "into many low apartments" and in addition there were "cow sheds, Negro cabins, a barn, a stable, a weaving room, a horse mill [and] a dovecote."²⁵ One journalist described the houses of Kaskaskia as "well built mostly of stone," and he fur-

²¹ *Ibid.* He began: "Mrs. Schieffelin whose figure and genius you and I have so often admired."

²² Maxwell to Edgar, May 25, 1767, *ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* On August 4, 1768, he wrote that all was going well again. Fleming wrote to Edgar: "Kiss all the ladies for me that will let you and I'll do the same for you." September 9, 1782, *ibid.* Edgar must have been the Don Juan of Detroit. Apparently doctors advocated a change of clime when a youth suffered a "melancholy disorder" from love affairs. This was Donald Campbell's impression. Campbell to Henry Bouquet, April 20, 1763, *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, XIX: 182. Sterling sent Lt. John Wynne, at Fort Erie, a barrel of 900 good onions. "Enough" he wrote, "to spoil your kissing for one Winter." Sterling Letter Book, September 18, 1765. Copy in the Burton Historical Collection.

²⁴ Narrative of Jean Baptiste Perrault in *ibid.*, XXXVII: 517.

²⁵ C. W. Alvord and C. E. Carter, *The Critical Period 1763-1765* (Illinois Historical Collections, X, Springfield, 1915), 126; Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 327. See also Pittman, *Present State of the European Settlements*, 85; and Volney, *View of the Soil and Climate*, 368.

ther noted that the inhabitants lived "generally well."²⁶ No doubt these villages presented to the visitor a peaceful and orderly appearance, with an air of permanency unusual on the frontier. Most of the houses had pointed roofs, thatched or bark, extending over the "galleries" or porches.

At one end of the building, and sometimes at both ends, was the large chimney of the generous fireplace. The houses stood close to the street for sociability's sake, and the yard around was protected by a whitewashed picket fence, within which were a flower garden, a small orchard of fruit trees, a vegetable garden, slaves' cabins, and a barn.²⁷

An inventory of the property of the Jesuits at Kaskaskia listed sixty-eight Negroes trained as farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, brewers and masons. Some of the wealthier families were even better off and owned numerous slaves. A member of the Bauvais family in 1765 owned eighty slaves and furnished the royal magazine at one time with eighty-six thousandweight of flour—which was only a part of one year's harvest. While no Detroit or Michillimackinac family had as many slaves, nevertheless, Indian or Negro slaves were common in all the more important families in the Old Northwest.

The settler was especially fond of horses, and horse

²⁶ Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 297. Such was also George Rogers Clark's observation. J. A. James, *George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781* (*Illinois Historical Collections*, VIII, Springfield, 1912), 30. Thomas Hutchins described the houses of Kaskaskia as "well built; several of stone, with gardens, and large lotts adjoining." Thomas Hutchins, *A Topographical Description of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and North Carolina*, edited by F. C. Hicks (Cleveland, 1904), 107-108.

²⁷ This description is taken from C. W. Alvord, *The Illinois Country, 1673-1818* (*Centennial History of Illinois*, I, Springfield, 1820), 215. In Detroit, the houses were of "Log or frame Work, shingled," and with the orchards adjoining, gave the settlement a "very smiling" appearance. *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, X:267. Again, the buildings were described as "low, being mostly a story and a half," and "the farms fertile." *Ibid.*, XVII: 595.

racing was one of his favorite pastimes.²⁸ With the coming of the English, more and more horses were introduced and efforts were put forth to improve the breed; in the last decade of the eighteenth century almost everyone had at least one horse, while the more prosperous merchants and traders possessed several.

During the winter months, pony racing on the ice was indulged in, with every young man of the village testing out a pony of uncertain speed.²⁹ An individual might challenge the whole village, or the village might challenge him, and then things began to happen. When the ice was solid, these races would take place along the edge of a river or lake; at Detroit they were held most frequently upon the River Rouge, a small stream below the main settlement, which, having a sluggish current, furnished excellent ice in season. This made an ideal place for that kind of sport, especially on account of the circuitous channel which allowed spectators to spread out considerably and have an unobstructed view.

Every Sunday after mass the crowd gathered at the appointed place and the fun was on. The challenged and the challenger brought out their ponies and scored for a start, while the crowd sized up the animals and the betting was furious. There was no starter, no jockey, no book-maker, no drawing for the pole. Each driver handled the reins over his own animal. He maneuvered for position and took his chances with his adversary. And when at last the ponies were off for the mile stretch down the river, the excitement among the multitude on the bank was something tremendous. If ever violence was done to the French language, it was upon such occasions, when individual opinions were struggling for utterance from hundreds of throats. Large sums of money changed hands, con-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, IV: 74-75. A census in 1767 listed 216 horses at Kaskaskia and 260 at Vincennes. Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 469. Thomas Hutchins mentioned the fine breed of horses. Hutchins, *op. cit.*, 100. Lindley noted that the French at Detroit were seen after mass "frolicking and horse racing in the road passing the worship house." *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, XVII: 595.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I: 54; IV: 75.

sidering the financial resources of the town.³⁰

Races often ended in severe altercations, sometimes leading to blows; disputes were commonly settled in court.

Not less popular in the winter were the sleighing and skating parties.³¹ When the autumnal rains came, submerging the lowlands, the wintry frosts soon followed, converting the flooded areas into miniature seas of glass. Detroit was especially fortunate in this respect, for about three or four miles above the fort was a large marsh, called by the French, *Le Grand Marais*. Here, when the winter weather was favorable, the inhabitants of the fort and village gave themselves unrestrainedly to the pleasures of dancing and other festivities. In the fall the young men of the town would build a long, narrow, log hut, with a fireplace at each end, for their parties. Rough hewn tables, which were easily taken down, were placed here and there. Early on Saturdays, young and old would come in sleighs, and after a sumptuous meal of wild turkey, bear steak and venison, washed down with quantities of wine, the rest of the day was spent in games of various kinds, but principally in dancing. These activities continued until the evening gun warned the party that:

The evening shades might be but 'vantage ground
For some fell foe.

Next day, Sunday, the gentlemen would go back after mass and spend the day in carousal, feasting on the remains of the preceding day's feast. Sleigh-riding on the

³⁰ Henry M. Utley and Byron M. Cutcheon, *Michigan as a Province, Territory and State, the Twenty-Sixth Member of the Federal Union* (New York, 1906), I: 316.

³¹ *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, I: 360-61; Madelaine Askin to John Askin, October 15, 1792, *Askin Papers*, I: 441.

ice, and balls and parties in town furnished entertainment for the rest of the week. "The summer's earnings scarce sufficed for the winter's waste."³² Indeed, one "French official wrote in 1737 that the inhabitants of the Illinois were burdened by debts as a result of their excessive drinking and gambling."³³

The people of the Illinois region were not usually so fortunate as those farther north, in having winters severe enough to furnish sufficient ice for skating or sleighing parties. However, the winter of 1783 was an exception in that the Mississippi froze from bank to bank at Cahokia and the ice held for an entire month "which gave the Créoles and the Spanish The pleasure of visiting." The crust of snow which had formed was strong enough to bear men and boys who were able to kill the deer with a "Stroke of the Hatchet" in the surrounding region.³⁴

Descriptions of the parties of that day are found in the poetry of the period too, for even the frontier did not lack its poets. One of the best known of all the post officials was Col. Arent Schuyler de Peyster, who settled at Dumfries, Scotland, after the War of American Independence. Here he became a close friend of his neighbor, Robert Burns. De Peyster was somewhat of a writer, and several of his short poems related to his life at Michillimackinac, Detroit, and Niagara, where he was commandant during the stirring years of 1775-1783. In

³² E. M. Sheldon, *The Early History of Michigan From the First Settlement to 1815* (New York, 1856), 371-72. Entertaining was very common and there was genuine hospitality. See especially the letter of George Morgan to his partners, Baynton and Wharton, October 30, 1768, Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, 447. One writer mentioned a ball which he attended at Fort de Chartres "given by a Gentleman of the Army, to the French Inhabitants who made a very droll appearance." Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 177. Hutchins also noted the politeness and hospitality of these folk. Hutchins, *op. cit.*, 110.

³³ Alvord, *Illinois Country*, 218.

³⁴ Narrative of Perrault, in *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, XXXVII: 516.

one of his poems he pictured the canoeing and racing on the River Rouge.³⁵ He enumerated those who were present, and described the festivities, the dancing, the races, and of course the drinking. All who had horses were present. The manager of the festivities for the occasion was Guillaume La Mothe, a Frenchman who was an officer in the Indian Department. An elaborate frontier feast followed the race, which was greatly enjoyed by the officers of the post, their wives, and their guests. So much drinking was indulged in that the party became boisterous and hilarious. With unusual license, the poet had the wild bears and deer come from the nearby woods and watch the pleasure-seekers in their hilarity.

The *habitant* was especially fond of a wedding, and kept up its festivities several days. The banns, announced at mass³⁶ on three preceding Sundays, formed the main subject of conversation in the ensuing days, for marriage was a lifelong contract of serious import, divorce being unknown. At the betrothal, the marriage contract was signed by both parties, their relatives, and their friends.³⁷ The bride also furnished a dowry, the amount depending upon the position of her father.³⁸ The ceremony took place soon after the betrothal. After the signing of the certificate and the church register, a

³⁵ *Miscellanies by an Officer, 1774-1813*, edited by J. W. de Peyster (New York, 1888).

³⁶ Sometimes this could not be done, as the "Mackinac Register" shows. The priest, under unusual circumstances, failed to announce the banns. *Wisconsin Historical Society Collections* (Madison, 1908, 1910), XVIII:471 ff. and XIX: 149. At Vincennes, the banns were published for three Sundays, but no doubt there were many irregularities. Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 526-27. Marriages between Catholics and Protestants were not unknown. C. W. Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records 1778-1790* (*Illinois Historical Collections*, V, Springfield, 1909), 570-71.

³⁷ See *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, IV: 75-76, for a copy of a marriage contract; also M. M. Quaife, *Some Glimpses of Life in Ancient Detroit* (*Burton Hist. Col. Leaflet*, III, no. 1, Detroit, 1924), 6-8.

³⁸ *Askin Papers*, I: 31-37. When James Sterling married Angelique Cuillerier, her father gave nearly a thousand pounds in dowry consisting of horses, money, and peltry. Sterling Letter Book, February 26, 1765.

great celebration followed, lasting for many hours, or until all were fatigued.³⁹ Sometimes the party took place at the *Grand Marais*, or, with dancing and feasting, at the home of the bride. The menu was in strange contrast with our modern feasts:

The *coup d'appetit* was passed around, brandy for the gentlemen, some mild cordial for the ladies; then followed the repast. Soup, *poissons blanc* (whitefish), *poisson doree* (pickerel), pike, roast pig, with its dressing of potatoes, blood pudding, partridges, wild turkey, ragouts, venison larded, pates of *pommes de terre* (potatoes), *sagammite*, a dish of porridge made of cracked corn, eaten with cream and maple sugar, . . . *praline* was dried corn, pounded fine and mixed with maple sugar; . . . *galettes au buerre, croquecignole* (a sort of doughnut), *omelette soufflee*, floating islands, pears, apples, raspberries, grapes in summer. Coffee ended the feast.⁴⁰

Other diversions were shooting,⁴¹ hunting, and fishing. Every man had his gun and knew how to use it. Indeed, his life very often depended upon his proficiency in the use of this instrument. The neighboring woods

³⁹ One can trace the relationship and social position of the parties in the church registers. "Mackinac Register," *Wis. Hist. Soc. Colls.*, XVIII: 471 ff. Reuben Gold Thwaites, "At the Meeting of the Trails; the Romance of a Parish Register," *Mississippi Valley Historical Association Proceedings* (Cedar Rapids, 1913), VI: 210-14 gives a vivid picture of some of the marriages.

⁴⁰ *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, IV: 76-77. Vegetables, fruits and meats of all kinds were found in abundance. See especially "Augustin Grignon's Recollections," *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, III: 255; XVIII: 272-73; *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, XVII: 640 ff; and the accounts of officials such as Henry Hamilton, Robert Rogers, John Bradstreet, Edward Abbott and Richard Dobie, and various travelers such as Johnathan Carver, Isaac Weld, John Lees, Alexander Henry and the Quakers who visited Detroit in 1793. Even delicacies from the outside world were not unknown. Capt. Dederick Brehm sent a keg of olives to some friends in Detroit, and wrote: "They were extremely good when I got them and I hope will arrive sound and good to your place." Brehm to Edgar, April 29, 1772, Edgar MSS. George Morgan, at Fort de Chartres, wrote his wife that he had "two Years Provisions in the House consisting of Salt Petred Gammons, Rounds of Beef, Buffaloe Tongues, Vennison & Bears Hams &c &c" and a large house containing 200 "couple" of pigeons. Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, 480, 481. Morgan also mentioned, in another letter, receiving tea "of a very bad quality," chocolate, coffee, sugar, rice, salt, etc. These settlers were not without the good things of the day. *Ibid.*, 441.

⁴¹ Fleming described his pleasures in hunting on the *Grand Marais* at Detroit. When leaving Montreal for Ireland to shoot ducks, September 9, 1782, he requested a small bag of wild rice from the *Grand Marais*, "cost what it will." Fleming to Edgar, Edgar MSS.

abounded in partridge (grouse), wild turkey, hare, deer, and what not, while the waters were filled with fish such as trout, whitefish, and sturgeon.⁴² Record after record tells of fishing parties on the Great Lakes in the winter. Holes were cut in the ice, in which were set lines and bait. Nets were dexterously placed under the ice for whitefish weighing three to seven pounds, which were used as bait to catch trout weighing from ten to sixty pounds. Now and then this sport ended in stark tragedy, for many a fisherman never returned. In summer, the weather was so hot and the air so filled with mosquitoes and black flies as to be a "counterpoise to the pleasure of hunting" and fishing. Nevertheless, Alexander Henry related his pleasure in shooting large numbers of wild pigeons at Sault Ste. Marie.⁴³ The marshes and swampy areas along the Mississippi, the Illinois, the Rock and other rivers were a hunter's paradise in the fall when great flocks of wild geese and ducks stopped to feed before going farther south.⁴⁴

During the spring, summer, and early fall, boat races were very popular. Every male was trained early in the management of the canoe, for boats were objects of necessity on the frontier. Rivers and lakes were the main roads in summer, and the only vehicle was the canoe.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, travel was not always by water, for at a very early period a road was built to connect the Illinois villages. It followed the American Bottom from Kaskas-

⁴² *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, I: 361; Alexander Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776* (New York, 1809), 53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 53-55, 59-61.

⁴⁴ It was recorded that the plains along the Mississippi were well stocked with buffalo, and "all Sorts of Game." Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 106. Clark wrote Mason, November 19, 1779, that the Illinois area was "covered with Buffaloes and other Game." James, *George Rogers Clark Papers*, 154. Hutchins made a similar observation. Hutchins, *Topographical Description*, 106.

⁴⁵ *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, I: 365-67.

kia to St. Philippe, where it divided, one branch continuing along the lowland to Cahokia, and the other along the top of the bluffs to the same village. From these villages, trails led in many directions. The canoes used by the inhabitants were made of the bark of trees,⁴⁶ birch being preferred; for the longer boats, trunks of trees were dug out or burned by slow fire. Great care had to be taken in all cases to see that the wood was perfect, for a boat which leaked was a great annoyance. Besides races, on a warm summer evening, the rivers and lakes along the settlements were filled with canoes in which young men and women enjoyed each other's company.

Nowhere can one find a lovelier picture of hardy frontier folk whose livelihood depended upon the waterways, than in those descriptions of the boatmen or *engagés*, who were noted for their songs. As they pulled across the placid waters of lake and river, labor was lessened by the chorus of voices that kept time to the strokes of oar and of paddle.

Faintly as tolls the evening chime,
Our voices keep time, and our oars keep time,
Soon as the woods on the shore look dim,
We'll sing at St. Ann's our parting hymn,
Row, brothers, row! the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near, and the daylight's past.⁴⁷

Thus one might hear a hundred voices, rising and falling in unison, as the boatmen passed over the waters of the Old Northwest.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Henry, *op. cit.*, 14, gives a good description of a canoe. Other accounts may be found in Wayne Stevens, *The Northwest Fur Trade, 1763-1800* (*University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences*, XIV, no. 3, Urbana, 1928), 151; and Frederick J. Turner, "The Character and Influence of the Fur Trade in Wisconsin," *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1889 (Madison, 1889), 78-80.

⁴⁷ *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, XXXVIII: 327.

⁴⁸ Other songs may be found in *ibid.*, I: 366-67; Mrs. John H. Kinzie, *Wau-Bun, The "Early Day" in the North-West* (Chicago, 1932), 47-49; Bela Hubbard, *Memorials of A Half-Century* (New York, 1888), 152-54; D. B. Martin, "The Fox River Valley in the Days of the Fur Trade," *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1899 (Madison, 1900), 122-23.

These *engagés* were picturesque, dressed in "gaudy turbans, or hats adorned with plumes and tinsel, their brilliant handkerchiefs tied sailor-fashion about swarthy necks, their calico shirts, and their flaming worsted belts" which circled their waists, holding their knives and tobacco pouches. Rough trousers, leggings, and cowhide shoes or gay moccasins completed their outfits.⁴⁹ Whenever a burial cross appeared, or a stream was left or entered, these rough "sons of the woods" removed their hats, and made the sign of the cross while one of their number uttered a short prayer; and again they were off, their paddles beating time to a rollicking French song:

Dans mon chemin, j'ai rencontré
Trois cavalières, bien montées;
L'on, lon, laridon daine,
Lon, ton, laridon dai,

Trois cavalières, bien montées,
L'un à cheval, et l'autre à pied;
L'on, lon, laridon daine
Lon, ton, laridon dai.⁵⁰

In all social life, French characteristics predominated, even throughout the British régime. During the summer evenings, though they were given much to drinking and gambling,⁵¹ the dance was the favorite amusement, and to this frolic came the men and matrons, young men and maidens; even the parish priest graced these festive occasions. The careless, pleasure-loving *coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs*, returning to the settlements, gave added color

⁴⁹ Turner, *ibid.*, 1889, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵¹ Cards were played incessantly, not always for money. To prevent abuses and disorders caused by "red or black slaves," Clark provided that they should take "their recreation in dancing on Sundays and feast days . . . during the daytime" and then only when they had a permit "signed by their masters." Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 65-66.

to these celebrations, at which all danced until the early morning hours or even daybreak, with little appearance of rowdyism or vulgarity to mar their simple festivities. The Sunday evening dance was particularly popular, attended by all—young and old, rich and poor. Every description which the records have furnished us of these festive occasions mentions the good behavior and fellowship that existed. Everyone joined happily in the church festivities, of which there were many—possibly too many for the good of the farmers; at least so some complained. In Illinois, the Mardi Gras was very popular; the evening was passed at one of the large homes, where the main contest was the flapping of pancakes, after which there was dancing. The charivari which followed most of the weddings of the day was also good fun, for it had not degenerated into the vulgar exhibition of more recent days. There were no age restrictions at these parties. Alexander Grant, Commodore of the Royal Navy on the Upper Lakes, wrote to his friend, John Askin: "We hop and bob every Monday night at the Council House."⁵² Later, at the age of seventy-one, he felt himself growing quite hearty again: "Danced fifteen couple down the other night," he wrote.⁵³ By this time, in addition to his strenuous life on the frontier, the Commodore had reared a family of twelve children (eleven of them were girls). His home, known as the Grant Castle, was always the scene of much gay life and hilarity.⁵⁴

⁵² *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, III: 27.

⁵³ Grant to Askin, December 19, 1805, *Askin Papers*, II: 498.

⁵⁴ M. M. Quaife, *Detroit Biographies: Commodore Alexander Grant* (*Burton Hist. Col. Leaflet*, VI, no. 5, Detroit, 1928), 76. "We have endeavoured to make the Winter pass as agreeably as we could, by having a Dance every week," wrote Askin to Grant, April 28, 1778, *Askin Papers*, I: 77. Also Askin to Charles Patterson, June 17, 1778, *ibid.*, 135. This seemed to be general. Richard Cartwright wrote: "I am glad you are so gaily and agreeably amused at Detroit, and tho we cannot pretend to vie with you

One of the outstanding characteristics of frontier society was its openhanded hospitality. Isolation from the outside world caused the people to welcome visitors, even total strangers, to their homes. Traveler after traveler testified to this trait, nowhere better pictured than in the warm reception and parties given Sir William Johnson when he visited Detroit in 1761.⁵⁵

It was a glorious September day when Sir William arrived. "Acutely aware that he appeared better on a horse than off," Johnson sent George Croghan ahead to procure mounts. A few miles below the settlement he met his deputy and mounted for his entry. The Indian villagers ran out to salute him; in reply he had the Royal Americans return three volleys from their boats. The naïve delight of this great man in the warmth of his reception in the heart of New France is evident in these lines of his diary:

All along the road was met by Indians, and near the town, by the inhabitants, traders, &c. When I came to the verge of the fort, the cannon thereof were fired, and the officers of the garrison with those of Gage's Light Infantry received me, and brought me to see my quarters, which is the house of the late commandant Mr. Belestre, the best in the place.

in Brilliancy yet we have our little Entertainments for which we are entirely beholden to the Gentlemen of the Garrison. We drink tea at the Fort every Saturday Evening, after that have a Concert, and then dance till about 12 o'clock, when we go to Supper." Cartwright to Edgar, February 17, 1780, Edgar MSS. In the early part of 1780 the following dancing bills were paid by:

Major de Peyster.....	£ 14/9/11
Captain Britton of the Navy.....	12/12/7
Captain Grant of the Navy.....	14/9/1
Captain Burnet.....	14/9/1
Mr. Forsythe.....	20/12/7

See Macomb Account Books in Burton Library. In 1780, the dancing bills amounted to £ 566/6/2. *Ibid.* The records also mention "Country Dance Books," and fiddles. *Askin Papers*, I: 79, 87, 142; Henry Hay's Journal, *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1914, p. 214 ff. The amount of liquors consumed at these parties was startling. See especially, Charles I. Walker, "The Northwest during the Revolution," *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, III: 27.

⁵⁵ "Private Manuscript Diary, kept by Sir William Johnson, on his Journey to and from Detroit, 1761," W. L. Stone, *The Life and Times of Sir William Johnson, Bart* (Albany, 1865), II: 457.

His time, when he was not in Indian Council, was spent in wining and dining, almost as feverishly as in modern Detroit. Sir William greatly enjoyed the sustained sociability, for he was never happier than when reveling in the table talk of men and the tea talk of ladies. Let Sir William tell of these delights:

Sunday [September] *6th*.—A very fine morning. This day I am to dine with Captain Campbell, who is also to give the ladies a ball, that I may see them. They assembled at 8 o'clock at night, to the number of about twenty. I opened the ball with Mademoiselle Curie—a fine girl. We danced until five o'clock next morning. . . .

Saturday 12th. . . . This morning four of the principal ladies of the town came to wait on me. I treated them with rusk and cordial. After sitting an hour, they went away. . . .

Sunday 13th.—Very fine weather At 10 o'clock, Captain Campbell came to introduce some of the town ladies to me at my quarters, whom I received and treated with cakes, wine and cordial. Dined at Campbell's. . . .

Monday, 14th.—Fine weather. This day I am to have all the principal inhabitants to dine with me; . . . I took a ride before dinner up toward the Lake St. Clair. The road runs along the river side, which is all thickly settled nine miles. . . . The French gentlemen and the two priests who dined with us got very merry. Invited them all to a ball to-morrow night, which I am to give to the ladies.

Here again he met the beautiful young lady, evidently by appointment, for he wrote:

Tuesday, 15th.—Fine weather. This day settled all accounts. . . . In the evening, the ladies and the gentlemen all assembled at my quarters, danced the whole night until 7 o'clock in the morning, when all parted very much pleased and happy. [I] promised to write Mademoiselle Curie as soon as possible my sentiments; there never was so brilliant an assembly here before.⁵⁶

Mademoiselle appeared no more in the diary. Might one raise the query whether this short-lived gaiety, with folk of his own kind, seriously tempted Sir William to

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 457, 459, 461-63.

marry a woman of his own class? We cannot answer; we only know of the "polite flutings of an elderly gallant a long way from home and enjoying what must, after all, be considered a butterfly flight in the fading sunlight." At least it was a strenuous life. But it would have been far more strenuous if his wife (his housekeeper, he called her), Molly Brant, had known of his doings at Detroit. It was well for her peace of mind, and possibly also well for Sir William's personal safety, that she was kept in ignorance, for there is little doubt that Molly's influence was very great with the Indians, and she was devoted to Sir William.⁵⁷

The hospitality continued even through the departure. On September 17, Sir William went downstream to a village of the Hurons, where he visited the priest. When the officers from the fort arrived, he treated them and the Indians, and was carried in a chair to Captain Jarvis' for breakfast; the good captain had three of these luxurious conveyances to prove the leadership of Detroit in transportation. "Officers prancing on horseback, Sir William and Captain and Mrs. Jarvis carried in their sedan chairs," the party went through three merry miles, stopping here and there to bid adieu to various citizens, who no doubt entertained them with the best their conditions afforded. "Dined with the company out of doors. Parted [from] them all at this place," he wrote. Probably there were "adieux, good-bys, Godspeeds, much fluttering of handkerchiefs, perhaps a furtive tear. After all, it had been a spendid visit, both in solid accomplishment and the hospitality offered by a cultivated French society, the more remarkable be-

⁵⁷ Molly was Joseph Brant's sister, and she possessed great influence among the Six Nations, especially the Senecas. *Ibid.*, 382, 503.

cause of the leagues of wilderness which hemmed it round.''⁵⁸

Another charming picture of life on the frontier is given by Henry Hay who, as a young fur trader, visited the post of Miamitown (now the teeming city of Fort Wayne, Indiana) during the winter of 1790.⁵⁹ Hay spoke particularly of the hospitality of these simple folk. He related that he had only been at the post a few days, when a Mrs. Adhamer manifested her politeness and attention by begging him to send his clothes and linen to her home for her Pani slave to launder, as it was most difficult to get clothes washed in such an out-of-the-way place.

From his journal one might gather the impression that life was all play, feasts, and dances, for all kinds of ceremonies followed each other in almost kaleidoscopic succession. The ringing of three cowbells by three boys running through the village "making as much noise as twenty cows would" called the settlers to midnight mass, and also to morning and evening prayers on Sunday. Musicians played their instruments on all occasions—drinking bout, dance or mass—and sometimes went "reeling from the one to the other." On one occasion, a joke was played on Mrs. Adhamer by stealing her pig, which was her "only support when the fresh meat" was killed; and the journalist added: "What hurt her more was, that she intended to kill it tomorrow." The excuse given for this fun was that she was a woman who was "amasingly fond of playing her jokes upon other people; . . . for which they were fully determined to play

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 464-65; Arthur Pound and Richard E. Day, *Johnson of the Mohawks* (New York, 1930), 341-42.

⁵⁹ *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1914, pp. 214-61.

her this one, which we premeditated upwards of three weeks ago."

Temperance reform or an age of sobriety certainly had not made any appearance at the forks of the Maumee. On Christmas night, Hay and his companions became "infernally drunk;" so far gone were they that one of the traders gave our journalist "his daughter Betsy over the bottle." The next morning, they found themselves "damnation sick" and unable to eat any breakfast. Nevertheless, they "went to mass and played as usual," first partaking of a cup of coffee to settle their heads. This did not keep them sober long, for the following evening all except the author became "very drunk;" one, being too drunk to leave, had to stay at the home of his host all night. The very next evening, the celebrants were "damned drunk" and the writer added that upon visiting some ladies the following morning he found his companions there imbibing again, but he refused their invitations to partake "at so unseasonable an hour as 11 o'clock in the morning;" however, he promised to join them in the afternoon.⁶⁰ On New Year's day, he made the rounds of the "Principal families" kissing all the "Ladies young and Old."⁶¹ The gay French spirit is evident in many places in the diary. On one occasion, after a flood, the ladies were "taken for a row on the river to the accompaniment of fiddle and flute," even before the high waters had sub-

⁶⁰ These people indulged in heavy drinking, as did all pioneer communities and contemporary society in general. When the *voyageurs* returned, there was much drinking and merrymaking, mingled with some lawlessness, for these men were noted as the most reckless class of the communities. In Kaskaskia in 1779, Jean Girault protested to the magistrates that some of the inhabitants became so drunk that they discharged their guns and endangered the lives and property of the citizens. Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 112.

⁶¹ Calls were generally made on New Year's day, when it was customary for the hostess to present her cheek to the departing guests for a goodbye kiss.

sided.⁶²

Alexander Fraser got a similar impression of frontier life. He wrote that the French folk of Illinois had a passion for drunkenness and were "for the greatest part drunk every day while they can get Drink to buy in the Colony." He further stated that the negroes were obliged to "Labour very hard to Support their Masters in their extravagant Debaucheries."⁶³

One does not find the same hospitality manifested toward the close of the century. The incoming horde of Americans was regarded by the old French stock much as the cultivated Romans regarded the invading Germanic barbarians. Thomas Bentley found life particularly difficult at Kaskaskia. He addressed a letter to his enemies on September 5, 1780, in which he stated:

I know that most of you are mortified to see me struggling to overcome the difficulties which you yourselves, conjointly with that rascal Rocheblave, Cerré, and others, have brought upon me. I am persuaded that there are not ten amongst you in this village who would not like to see me crushed under the load of my misfortunes. I know that it is a crime for a damned Englishman to attempt to stay among you; Irishmen suit you better; they are equal to you in perfidy; as for lying, flattering, and drinking tafia, they can do it as well as any of you.⁶⁴

Again this situation is well illustrated by a letter which Frederick Bates, a young Virginian (and neighbor and friend of Thomas Jefferson), who had recently come to Detroit to seek his fortune, wrote to his sister. Bates may be regarded as a fair representative of the Virginia planter aristocracy of the time, and both in Detroit and

⁶² *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1914, p. 208 ff. Oliver Spencer had similar experiences when a captive of the Indians in 1792. He wrote of the pleasure he had in Detroit. M. M. Quaife, *An Indian Captive's Picture of Early Detroit* (Burton Hist. Col. Leaflet, III, no. 5, Detroit, 1925), 69.

⁶³ Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 228.

⁶⁴ Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 203.

in St. Louis (to which place he removed) he held numerous important public offices. At the time of writing this letter, Bates was twenty-two years of age, and a comparatively recent arrival at Detroit. He wrote:

I make but little progress with the french girls. They are not very apt to think favorably of the Americans. They think them a rough unpolished, brutal set of people. The pleasure of walking on a sunday evening, is almost counter-balanced by the trouble attendant on that parade & ceremony with which the salutations of the French must be returned. The Miss Grants daughters of the Commodore of the British Squadron on the upper Lakes, are the finest girls in this country. Their mother is a Canadian and they are Roman Catholics. Last Christmas I went early to the midnight mass, and seated myself in their Pew. They came, and with the most obliging good nature, requested me to make room,—I rose—apologized for my intrusion—& seated myself in the Pew next to them, Determined to be diverted at my expence, they beckoned to me as many as three times to move, as I was in the seat of a lady who was coming in. After mass, I remonstrated with them on their cruelty in taking such pleasure in my embarrassment. They thought it a cruelty, which they might very innocently exercise. Their father altho' in the British service lives on this side the Strait, on one of the best Farms in the Country. Their mother (which is a singular circumstance among French Ladies) superintends the farm, the produce of which, supports the Family very decently. The old Gentleman's salaries as Commodore and privy Counsellor, are funded, as portions for the girls.⁶⁵

Even an election day was a holiday for old and young, voter and voteless. They were occasions "to meet, to smoke to carouse and swagger," though the records leave one in doubt as to whether they ended in drunken brawls. A leading candidate for the provincial legislature of Upper Canada, in the election of 1792, was David W. Smith of Detroit, who has left considerable corre

⁶⁵ Quoted in M. M. Quaife, *Detroit Biographies: Commodore Alexander Grant* (Burton Hist. Col. Leaflet, VI, no. 5, Detroit, 1928), 77. Bates was in Detroit at the close of the century.

spondence concerning this campaign.⁶⁶

Perusal of these records leaves no doubt that neither human nature nor the methods of politicians have altered materially since 1792. Smith was willing to spend money freely, although even as with candidates today, there could be no hope of ever securing its return unless by indirect means. The inducements to the voters took the form of free tavern entertainment, accompanied by lavish dispensing of liquors. "Should I be returned without an undue Election or the appearance of party or bribery, I shall be most happy," wrote Smith on July 26, "& in that case I beg an Ox may be roasted whole on the common, & a barrel of Rum be given to the mob, to work down the Beef."

With the passage of time, the candidate's ideas concerning entertainment of the voters became more expansive, and in a letter to John Askin on August 14, he presented this captivating picture:

The french people can easily walk to the Hustings, but my gentry will require some conveyance; if boats are necessary you can hire them, & they must not want beef or Rum, let them have plenty, and in case of success I leave it to you, which you think will be best to give my friends a public dinner, & the ladies a dance, either now, or when I go up. If you think the moment the best time You will throw open Forsyths Tavern, & call for the best he can supply. I trust you will feel very young on the occasion, in the dance, & I wish that Leith and you should push about the bottle, to the promotion of the Settlements on the Detroit. The more broken heads & bloody noses there is the more election like, and in case of Success (damn that if!) let the White Ribbon favors be plentifully distributed, to the old, the Young, the Gay, the lame, the cripple & the blind—half a score cord of wood piled hollow, with a tar barrel in the middle, on the

⁶⁶ For the information which follows, I have drawn upon M. M. Quaife's excellent article, *Detroit's First Election* (*Burton Hist. Col. Leaflet*, V, no. 2, Detroit, 1926). Elections in Illinois were held largely for members of the court and therefore there was not the same energetic electioneering as occurred in Detroit for members of the provincial legislature.

Common, some powder, pour tiner, & plenty of Rum. I am sure that you will preside over & do ev[er]ything that is needful, as far as my circumstances will admit. there must be no want & I am sure you will have ev[er]ything handsome & plentiful.

Elliot I am sure will give you a large red flag to be hoisted on a pole near the Bon fire, and some blue colored tape may be sewn on in large letters E S S E X . . . Have proper booths erected for my friends at the Hustings, employ Forsyth to make large plumb Cake, with plenty of fruit & ca & be sure let the Wine be good & plenty. Let the peasants have a fiddle, some beverage & Beef.⁶⁷

It would be easy to add numerous descriptions of the many other sports which tempt one to linger, but one can only mention other phases of social activity which more than filled the hours of leisure. Running, wrestling, rowing, bowling on the narrow streets, arrow shooting, quoits, and especially card playing during inclement weather, are only a few of the many ways in which the inhabitants of the Old Northwest enjoyed life to the fullest.

So happy and carefree was life in the western wilderness that those who moved elsewhere were inclined to yearn for the pleasures of the posts. "I cannot but repeat again our Inclinations and wishes are to be with you. . . . [My wife's]⁶⁸ mind is occupied with reflections of the many happy hours passed at Detroit, it is to be hoped that sometime or another we shall have a renewal of the like pleasures," wrote Lieutenant Mercer to John Askin.⁶⁹ De Peyster was most happy during his stay in Michigan. "A sore heart it gave us to leave Detroit,"

⁶⁷ Smith to Askin, August 14, 1792, *Askin Papers*, I: 427-28.

⁶⁸ Refers to Phyllis Barthe, wife of Lieut. Daniel Mercer.

⁶⁹ Mercer to Askin, Reading (in Berkshire) April 29, 1790, *ibid.*, I: 365. Askin's daughter, Madelaine, wrote her father she was sure that she would not have as pleasant a winter at Queenstown as she had had at Springwells, "but I may have the pleasure of talking about them with the ladies of the 5th. I assure you they regret leaving Detroit." Madelaine Askin to John Askin, October 15, 1792, *ibid.*, 441. From Plymouth, England, John Burnet wrote Askin of his "many happy days" at Detroit. Burnet to Askin, March 6, 1787, *ibid.*, 283.

he informed a friend, "had we but some of our relations there, I could have spent my life in its little society."⁷⁰ Richard Cartwright, Jr.,⁷¹ described the people of Detroit as "gaily and agreeably amused" and admitted that the social life at Niagara could not pretend to vie with Detroit in its brilliancy.⁷²

Not long after the War of Independence with its ravages, and the continued uncertainty which prevailed concerning trade at the western posts, social life lost much of its thrill and charm. In Illinois there was a period of anarchy and confusion which began before the close of the war and continued for some years.⁷³ Tyranny followed tyranny, bringing disorder and chaos. John Edgar, who used his influence to promote peace, wrote to Major John Hamtramck in September, 1789:

The name of an American among them [the Indians] is a disgrace, because we have no superior. Our horses, horned cattle, & corn are stolen & destroyed without the power of making any effectual resistance: Our houses are in ruin & decay; our lands are uncultivated; debtors absconded & absconding; our little commerce destroyed. We are apprehensive of a dearth of corn, and our best prospects are misery and distress, or what is more than probable an untimely death by the hands of savages.⁷⁴

Father Gibault at Vincennes well summed up conditions when he said: "In Canada all is civilized, here all is barbarous. You are in the midst of justice, here injustice dominates. . . . Everybody is in poverty, which engenders theft and rapine. Wantonness and drunkenness pass here as elegance and amusements quite in style."⁷⁵ Some

⁷⁰ De Peyster to Edgar, July 7, 1784, Edgar MSS.

⁷¹ See *Askin Papers*, I: 188 for sketch.

⁷² Cartwright, Jr. to Edgar, February 17, 1780, Edgar MSS.

⁷³ Alvord, *The Illinois Country*, chaps. XVI-XX.

⁷⁴ Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 510. Other letters describing conditions are in *ibid.*, 511, 513-14.

⁷⁵ Gibault to the Bishop of Quebec, June 6, 1786, *ibid.*, 542-43. See also *ibid.*, 199, 234, 315, 362, 454. The people also suffered from the hands of the military. *Ibid.*, 137.

found the winters long and tedious, and hoped to move away.⁷⁶ "This place once the gaiest and most sociable known has undergone surprising changes," wrote Anthon⁷⁷ to Edgar. "Numbers of people ruined," he continued, "old Acquaintances Dead and gone, a gloomy Aspect in all most every ones face, great demands and small remittances, seizures and Executions in Abundance, and I am afraid a Universal Bankruptcy will ensue among the Trading people here."⁷⁸ These conditions did not last long, however. The depression was temporary, and soon life was as gay and brilliant as ever, and continued so to the close of the British régime.⁷⁹

One is inclined to dwell longer and in much greater detail upon the social activities of these past romantic days. Life in the harsh conditions⁸⁰ of the wilderness, when intercourse with the outside world was so uncertain, was not one of seclusion, or of toil only, but was

⁷⁶ George Anthon to Edgar, September 26, 1785, Edgar MSS.

⁷⁷ See *Askin Papers*, I: 48 for sketch.

⁷⁸ Anthon to Edgar, September 26, 1785, Edgar MSS. He mentioned Detroit people who put money in the Bank of North America as "broke and undone."

⁷⁹ Donald Campbell wrote: "For my own part I am heartily tired of Detroit, tho' the best frontier Garrison I begin to know the People too well, I do not think they improve on a long acquaintance." Campbell to Bouquet, July 3, 1762, *Mich. Hist. Colls.*, XIX: 154. Another comment: "You talk of your place [Detroit] being duller than ever. &c. believe me it cannot be put in competition with ours [Michillimackinac] for dullness jealousy & envy with all the etceteras mentioned in your's. Where Society is thin, I agree with you, They should make the most of it." Duggan to Selby, June 3, 1796, *ibid.*, XII: 211.

⁸⁰ Life was hard and there was much unhealthiness, especially along the Mississippi lowlands. George Morgan claimed that no French native of Illinois was known to have lived "to an old Age." Alvord and Carter, *New Régime*, 439. The soldiers suffered considerably from lack of medical supplies, etc. See especially the letter of Maj. John Hamtramck to Gen. Josiah Harmar, July 29, 1789. Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 506. Then there was a period of great disorder and confusion in Illinois following the war. John Edgar wrote to Major Hamtramck, October 28, 1789: "An attempt has been made to steal my property & slaves, & the life of my wife, as well as that [of] Mrs. Jones was in the most imminent danger: . . .

"Every day we are threatened with being murdered, & having our houses & village burnt; the Pianakeshaws steal our horses, & take them to the Spanish side, where they live, & where we dare not, even allowing we had sufficient force, follow them; so that truly speaking, our situation is desperate & even pitiful." *Ibid.*, 513. A short but excellent account of the disorder and confusion in Illinois is in Robert L. Schuyler, *The Transition in Illinois from British to American Government* (New York, 1909), 87-111.

interspersed with all the hilarity and joymaking that could be obtained in such a situation. Human nature was far from being suppressed, and the picture left is one of charm and gaiety, often of passion unrestrained. Those were happy days. It was a simple life with simple pleasures, possibly a life which cannot be found in the tumult and shouting of this ultra modern age.

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